

Letter from Taizé

April – May 2003 Bimonthly 0,50 euro 2



PROCESSED

MAR 26 2003

OTU LIBRARY

YOUNG ADULT MEETING 2002-2003 IN PARIS

A Larger Europe Breathes the Good News



This winter, just a few days after the Copenhagen summit meeting that gave the final endorsement for the entry into the European Union of ten new central European countries, almost 80,000 young people from an even larger Europe came together in Paris to celebrate the Risen Christ, the bearer of peace.

Perhaps more than in previous years, the European meeting was noticed and understood far beyond religious circles. "Christian Europe from Copenhagen to Taizé," "The united Europe of young Christians in Taizé," "The young people of Taizé will make Europe," "Paris, capital of trust." These were the headlines in several important French newspapers.

For the curious observer, the new geography of a wider Europe became visible early in the morning of Saturday December 28th along the large boulevards of Paris. Hundreds of coaches came to the areas near the Paris Expo at the Porte de Versailles and the Montparnasse train station, to drop off the crowds of young

people who had come for the twenty-fifth stage in the pilgrimage of trust on earth. There were 2000 from Serbia, 4000 Romanians, 1000 Ukrainians, several hundred Russians, to mention only those from faraway lands.

Those who did not have time to read the newspapers were astonished to see people singing in the metro without asking for money. "Why are you here? What brought you to Paris at this time of year?"

It was not so easy to answer this question: what could a "pilgrimage of trust" mean in a society where it is hard to imagine that signs have the power to change daily life?

Don't build your life on fear!

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in a radio interview he gave on December 30th after the evening prayer, tried to answer that question: "We are living at a time which is dominated by fear, the fear of terrorism, of poverty, of all forms of evil. And in Taizé there is no fear. The first teaching of Taizé for me is: 'Don't be afraid!' 'Don't build your life on fear!' Peace is the end of conflict, the end of fear. In the gathering around Taizé I see a kind of prophetic anticipation of what we



In Notre-Dame de Paris

wish to see in the institutions of the world."

"Don't be afraid!" That is not only the first words of one of the new songs in French. It may be the first French phrase that the young volunteers from over ten different nationalities had to learn, those who were in Paris to prepare the hospitality with the 350 parishes and congregations of all denominations in Paris and the surrounding region. For several months, hundreds of visits made to parishes echoed this Gospel call.

Trust begins with small things. Who would have imagined during the first visits in September that, in spite of all the uncertainties, 40,000 places for participants would be found in families? A young volunteer recalled the first announcement he made, at the end of Mass in a parish on the outskirts of the city, to invite people to look for places to house the pilgrims. "80,000 of them will be coming, maybe more, no one knows. You don't know them, but it's good to offer them hospitality and to go visit families you don't know so that they too can welcome young people you don't know!"

"A kind of prophetic anticipation of what we wish to see in the institutions of the world," as Paul Ricoeur put it. Approximately 150 town governments offered the free use of one or more gymnasiums as accommodations for those who could not stay with families. Some of them had to deal with the daily problems of low-income, rundown neighborhoods. At Garges-les-Gonesses, the preparation team, made up of three girls of African and Indian background, said that, when they arrived on December 28th, the Polish were extremely surprised to see that only one of the host families was white. "They discreetly asked a woman of the parish if all these people were French, and they were even

more surprised when she said yes. Many host families were originally from Sri Lanka, because a few Catholic families had managed to get the whole community involved, even the Hindus."

The European meeting is a simple way to make visits, as if everyone were neighbors. Some people were very struck by this dimension of rediscovering social bonds.

During the mornings spent in the local congregations to share signs of hope with the people of the neighborhood, several preparation teams had the idea of asking the mayor or one of the town councilors to talk about his or her involvement in political and social life. This is surprising in a country marked so strongly by a very strict idea of the separation of church and state. At Ivry sur Seine, where the Communists have been in charge since the 1930s, the 400 young people welcomed there had a meeting one morning with the mayor. "I felt that the Europe of twenty-five countries was already becoming a reality. Among these young people, there will be some who will have an impact in their respective countries. If this Taizé meeting can lead to a common awareness concerning Europe, it's important."

Also in Ivry, the youth of the Catholic parish wanted to illustrate in different

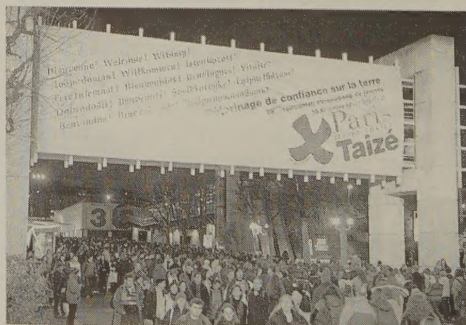
ways the commitment made by men and women who attempt to serve others. Kamel, who leads a theater group made up mainly of young people of North African background, explains, "On Tuesday morning we welcomed about thirty young people. The discussion was captivating. It motivated fifteen members of our group to attend the New Year's Eve festival in the parish. Everything worked well; they felt welcome. The following days we talked about it some more; they were enthusiastic. We would like to continue along these lines and do things this year in common with the young people of the student parish."

"Why are you here?" Bishop Daucourt of the diocese of Nanterre replied, "These meetings remind us that the Church does not exist for itself. It exists for the world, to be a bearer and a sign of that communion that Jesus wanted to create, not just among Christians, but among all the people of the world." In Paris there was an atmosphere of festival, created by a Church that had no other desire than to be welcoming and to be a sign of communion. By their simple presence, the participants in the meeting were able to reveal the existence of a sincere and profound search. Olivier Clément, the Orthodox theologian, wrote an article about the Paris meeting in a French newspaper. "From Taizé's perspective," he wrote, "the Church is called to become what it already is in its depths—the land of the living."

Liberate the underlying goodness

"Peace is not just the absence of war; it is not a peace treaty. Peace is a state of non-conflict, the suspension of conflict. It is a mutually recognized state of goodness, and that is what one experiences in Taizé. Thanks to Taizé, it can be understood that the basic function of religion is to liberate the hidden goodness of others, to liberate the underlying goodness, that is what we should say..." Paul Ricoeur spoke these words in the same radio interview.

At the heart of the meeting is set the



prayer. Repeated three times a day, like the rhythmic breathing of the Good News, it prepares the most concrete steps toward peace in the search for peace of heart. "Begin the work of peace in yourselves," said Saint Ambrose, the bishop of Milan in the fifth century, "so that once you are at peace, you can bring peace to others."

Jean, who was part of one of the preparation teams in Paris, says, "Despite all the work a parish preparation team has to do, I was able to free myself to go to the Porte de Versailles for the times of prayer and the afternoon program. If I had to sum up those prayers, I would use two words: beauty and simplicity. The beauty of the prayer spaces was such that you could enter easily into a dialogue with God. This year, the large paintings took up the motifs of the stained-glass windows of the Cathedral of Chartres or the Sainte Chapelle. You found yourself starting to count the number of prayers still remaining in the meeting, like a child who counts the number of vacation days left before school begins again."

Cardinal Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, came one evening to greet the participants. "For Europe, whose peoples received in the past the joy of the Gospel, you are messengers sent by Christ. Heal the wounds of the past. Where hatred was rampant, show the force of love. Go forward boldly towards the future." Jean-Arnold de Clermont, the president of the Protestant Federation of France, took part in one of the evening prayers, and the different Orthodox Churches of the region participated in the welcome of the young people.

Liberate the underlying goodness, in oneself and in others... During the afternoons, specific ways of going further with this reflection and putting it into practice were proposed. "There is happiness in responding to God's call." "A Gospel challenge: loving one's enemies." "God chooses not to remain hidden—a mystery of love glimpsed in icons." "Struggling against poverty in our own country." "Is there a hope for peace today? (Discussion led by an expert in international questions.)" "Violence affects the young: how can we react?"

Several initiatives were offered to



make it possible to join those who, for one reason or another, could not or dared not come to the meeting. Visits to prisons, rest homes, hospitals, a meeting with the staff of the Jeanne Garnier Home, a place where the terminally ill are welcomed...

The afternoon of December 29th, the young people at Trappes met traveling people living in a camp not far from the Catholic student parish, where the women of this community get together. Aurélie, a young student from the East of France, explains, "Once we were in the train going towards Trappes, many questions came to our mind: we refer to the traveling people as gypsies; their rhythm of life is set by travels in caravans and especially as a family. But what else can we say about them? Are they Christian? Do their children go to school? Are they French? How do they support themselves? I don't know. I think that my only fear was that they would not believe that we were not coming to see them out of curiosity, but really to share something of our lives. In the end, I was very happy to have discovered these people of my own country who have a rhythm of life and especially customs that are very different from mine, even though they live beside me. I find it very beautiful that each of

us took time to share a moment of our lives. The sharing was truly mutual."

The evening of December 31st, during the final prayer of the European meeting, in the presence of 80,000 young adults from throughout Europe as well as from other continents, Brother Roger concluded:

"During these days of meeting, a question has come up: how can we find new energy in order to continue our journey, again and yet again? Far from letting ourselves be filled with worry, we would like to listen to the call that the Gospel addresses to all of us: 'Leave worry behind, yes leave behind hopelessness, let your soul live!'

"When young people make a resolution for peace in their own life, they support a hope that is communicated afar, ever further afar. When you return home, each of you can begin to become a beacon of peace. We know that we live in a world where light and darkness co-exist. If each of you were to become a beacon of peace, through you there would be a new light in the human family on earth. And so, for my part, I would go to the ends of the earth if I could to express over and over again my trust in the younger generations."



Workshop in a local health center.

Who are the peacemakers
that Jesus praises in the Gospel?

How can we persevere
in the hope for peace?

Peacemakers are those who make the earth a place where it is good to live. There is peace when everybody has what he or she needs to lead a happy life. *Shalom*, the Hebrew word, includes health, prosperity, good relationships within families and with one's neighbors, security. Peace is a fullness of life that eliminates the anxiety of lacking something. Peace is present when everything goes well, and there is no jealousy or bitterness.

God is a peacemaker. He created the world, and wants to give it peace. These two things are related. The work of peace completes the work of creation. Everything God creates is good: "God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). But injustices and wars disfigure this aspect of creation. Only peace justifies the risk God took in creating. As creator of the world, God also has to be the creator of peace.

God is not alone in this work of peace. In the crowd that comes to the hillside to listen to him, Jesus recognizes those who work with God for peace. About them he says, "Happy the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Peacemakers make up God's close family; they are his own sons and daughters. In those days, this also meant that they shared the same occupation. "The son does what he sees the father doing" (see John 5:19). Peacemakers work with the eyes of their heart focused on God.

Withdrawal into passivity does not advance the cause of peace. Creative energies are needed to "conquer evil by good" (Romans 12:21). It is true that, in their freedom, God's children sometimes abdicate their rights: "If someone wants to go to law with you to take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well" (Matthew 5:40). Peacemakers are not afraid of conflicts. But first of all they face the fears and rebellions within themselves. And when they are free within, they dare to act in unexpected and courageous ways that overturn the logic of confrontation.

Christ leads us along this road that involves an inner struggle (Ephesians 2:14-18). To "create a new humanity and make peace," he did not flee situations of conflict. He exposed himself to the hatred that in the end nailed him to the cross. But in reality, it was Christ who remained alive and hatred that died. On the cross, he "destroyed hostility" in his own self and "put hatred to death." Humiliated and insulted, Jesus experienced the feelings of every person who suffers. "He was put to the test in all things just as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). A thirst for vengeance and seeds of violence assailed his human heart. But by loving to the very end, he did not give into them, and so he opened for us the way of peace.

The Gospel opens with a great hope for peace: "Glory to God in highest heaven and peace on earth to human beings, the objects of his favor" (Luke 2:14). Since the first Christmas night, this promise has resounded in the singing of the Gloria. It is true that, later on, the Gospels mention the great trials that peoples go through—famines, upheavals and wars. But the beginning of the Gospel sets the tone: God did not send his Son in order that nothing would change. His glory in heaven is peace on earth. Even in the darkest hours, the memory of this promise is a source of perseverance.

Human efforts for peace are also sustained by the desire for happiness. "Who among you delights in life and longs for days of prosperity? (...) Seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:10-11). Whoever loves life is motivated to seek peace. But this peace is always fragile, and that is why it must be sought with determination. It is like a frightened bird that can only be tamed by boundless patience. Concretely, that means neutralizing in time the poison of harsh words, not getting bogged down in misunderstandings, stopping conflicts at the very beginning. It means, in short, "covering over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Love is what does this. Love that is inventive and ready to forgive is tireless. It is able to take away from wrongs and sins their power to harm and to destroy peace.

But how can we persevere when peace is really not possible, at least in the short term? The apostle Paul writes, "As much as possible, and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:17-18). Paul insists on the hope of a universal peace. But when peace with all is impossible, that is not a reason to give up. Peace is not a matter of all or nothing. It can always begin somewhere; we can prepare it for the future.

For God, even the impossible is possible. Through prayer, doors open to what is unexpected. Praying for peace is like asking for our daily bread: today we need bread, and today too we need a little bit of peace. In prayer, we do not try to look far into the future; we simply ask for what we need here and now. As the song *Da pacem in diebus nostris* says, give peace in our day.

Saint Paul concludes one of his letters with this wish: "May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way" (2 Thessalonians 3:16). On other occasions, he calls God "the God of peace" and "the God of hope" (Romans 15:33 and 13). Christians cannot despair of peace, unless they despair of God. For our God is hope, and our God is peace.

God of mercy,
enable us to wait for
you in prayer and to
welcome the look of
love with which you
contemplate each of
our lives.

1 Thu Dt 7:7-8 Moses told the people: God set his heart on you and chose you, not because you are more numerous than other peoples, but out of love for you.

2 Fri Mt 5:1-12 Jesus said: Blessed are you when people falsely say all kinds of things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

3 Sat Is 30:15 The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

4 Sun Lk 24:35-48 The Risen Christ opened their minds of his disciples to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead."

5 Mon Mt 13:44-46 Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a trader looking for precious pearls, who on finding one of great value, goes, sells everything he has and buys it.

6 Tue Lk 6:27-35 Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

7 Wed Jn 2:24-28 John wrote to the first Christians: Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

8 Thu Jn 4:5-42 Jesus said: Any one who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

9 Fri 1 Co 7:29-31 Paul writes: From now on those who buy something should live as if they did not possess and those who use the things of the world should do so without being engrossed in them. Because this world as we know it is passing away.

10 Sat Jr 17:5-8 The person who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the water: in a year of drought it is untroubled and never ceases to bear fruit.

11 Sun Jn 10:11-18 Jesus said: There are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd.

12 Mon Mt 5:1-12 Jesus said: Happy are the clear in heart: they shall see God. Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God.

13 Tue Ps 138 I thank you, God, for your love and your faithfulness; you have given new strength to my heart.

14 Wed Lk 19:1-10 Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

15 Thu Jude 20-21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

16 Fri Jn 6:37-40 Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

17 Sat Lk 6:46-49 Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

18 Sun Jn 15:1-5 Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

19 Mon Mk 12:41-44 Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

20 Tue 2 S 22:17-20 The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I am and set me in the open.

21 Wed Ep 2:13-22 In Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.

22 Thu Dt 6:4-9 Moses said to the people: The Lord our God is the only God. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

23 Fri Rm 6:12-14 Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you—you are not under law, but under grace.

24 Sat Ps 72 In God's days justice will flourish, and peace in plenty until the end of time. For the Lord rescues the needy who call to him and the poor who have no one to help.

25 Sun Jn 15:9-17 Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

26 Mon Sl 2:1-11 You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.

27 Tue Jn 15:15-17 Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

28 Wed 1 Jn 5:14-15 John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

29 Thu Ep 4:1-13 ASCENSION Christ descended to the depths of the earth, and he who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

30 Fri Lk 24:46-53 After Jesus' ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

31 Sat Lk 1:46-55 Mary said: My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

MAY
MEDITATING ON THE WORD

1 SUN Jn 17:6-11 Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: "I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one."

2 Mon Is 45:1-7 God says: "I will go before you and will level the mountains so that you may know that I am the Lord, the one who calls you by name."

3 Tue Dt 15:7-11 Be open-handed towards your neighbour and towards the poor and needy in your land.

4 Wed Rm 14:13-19 St. Paul writes: The kingdom of God is not a question of exterior rules, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

5 Thu Ac 10:1-35 Peter said: I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that in every nation he loves those who revere him and act justly.

6 Fri Mt 12:1-8 Jesus said: It is mercy that pleases me, not sacrifice.

7 Sat Jn 14:1-12 Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

8 SUN Jn 16:12-15 PENTECOST Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

9 Mon Jr 31:31-34 The Lord says: I shall put my law deep within them, I shall write it on their hearts. I shall be their God and they will be my people.

10 Tue 1 Jn 1:5-7 If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we are in communion with one another.

11 Wed Ps 119:1-16 With all my heart I seek you, O God. I treasure your promises in my heart so as not to sin against you.

12 Thu Col 3:12-17 Paul writes: May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one Body.

13 Fri 1 Tm 4:12-16 Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

14 Sat Mt 5:38-48 Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

15 SUN Mt 28:16-20 Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

16 Mon Is 40:29-31 Those who hope in God shall renew their strength. They shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not be tired.

17 Tue 1 Jn 1:1-7 This is what we have heard from Christ: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all.

18 Wed Ep 4:25-32 Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

19 Thu Mk 14:12-26 During the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, saying: Take this; this is my body.

20 Fri Jn 10:1-10 Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

21 Sat 2 Co 1:3-7 Blessed be God who consoles us in all our afflictions. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

22 SUN Mk 4:35-41 When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

23 Mon Ga 5:16-18, 22-23 Let yourselves be guided by the Spirit and you will not be under the Law. For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, trust in others and self-control.

24 Tue Is 49:1-6 St JOHN THE BAPTIST The Lord says: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

25 Wed Dt 30:11-14 God's Word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

26 Thu 1 Jn 4:12-21 Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see cannot love God whom they do not see.

27 Fri Ep 2:13-18 Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God, through the cross.

28 Sat Ph 1:1-11 Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

29 SUN Mt 16:13-20 SS PETER AND PAUL Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

30 Mon Is 26:7-9 My soul longs for you in the night, Lord, and deep within me, my spirit seeks you.

Jesus, joy of our hearts, you send your Holy Spirit upon us. He comes to reawaken trust within us. Through him, we realize that the simple desire for God brings our soul back to life.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Abraham is in a difficult situation: did he not leave everything to respond to God's call (Gen 12:4)? But not only does God's promise take time to become reality; it seems to become more and more impossible.

The patriarch is thus called to do something absolutely new; he has to believe that God is preparing a future for him. The early Christians will speak of him as their ancestor in faith, a man who hoped against all hope (Romans 4:16-25). Far from remaining theoretical, that faith inspires a new way of living (James 2:21-23) that is surprising and can even seem insane.

Abraham watches for signs of God's presence and call. But although God gives him signs in the course of his life, his searching does not come to an end for all that. On the contrary, the signs he receives lead Abraham to go further in a faith which is at one and the same time ever more demanding and fragile. In fact, God is waiting for a free decision from him. That is why the signs remain surprisingly discreet, embedded in the story of his life.

God's call, far from abolishing our freedom, presupposes it. The only way we can respond to that call is by exercising our freedom, in other words by taking the risk of interpreting the signs God offers us and giving a personal response, a free response that is the only way to make a response of love. "Lift up your eyes..."

- What simple signs does God give me of his love?
- What helps me to keep going when my expectations are put to the test?

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel we meet John the Baptist. He opens the door of the New Covenant by inviting people to a baptism of repentance. He recognizes in Jesus the one who is to come. And yet his faith is not without worry. In prison, before being put to death, he still asks, "Are you the one who is to come or should we wait for someone else?" (Matt 11:2-3).

Our faith is like that of John. Even if we believe in Christ and root our lives in the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are still waiting for the one who is to come. In this waiting, what we undertake remains incomplete and fragmentary. Because of this, worry can insinuate itself into our life.

That is why it is good to remember the task that is assigned to us: "Prepare the way." To the extent that we become aware of this dimension of the Christian life, worry disappears and vital energies are awakened. It is not up to us to bring salvation. By our life, our deeds and our words, all we do is to prepare the way so that someone greater can come.

In the Eastern Churches, John the Baptist is honored like the Virgin Mary. On the iconostasis both are close to Christ, standing at his right and his left. Honoring the Baptist means knowing how to wait expectantly for God. It means believing that God acts in history, being able to live in an incomplete and provisional period and discerning there signs of God's presence. In the steps of John, we will be women and men who accept that God comes when and how he wishes.

- In what situations do I have to remember that my task is simply to "prepare the way"?
- By what other deeds or words does John the Baptist give support to our faith still today?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Japan

Watching Steadfastly for the Dawn

«My soul waits for the Lord, more than the watchman for the dawn» (Psalm 130:6). This verse from the Psalms became one of the cornerstones of the recent Taizé meetings in Japan, and the source of many of the questions that were the focus of our meditation. How can we become «people of hope», men and women who steadfastly watch for the dawn, who are ready to «open paths of trust even in humanity's darkest hours» (Brother Roger, *Love and Say It With Your Life*)? And while we are waiting for the dawn, how can we use all our creativity to communicate signs of hope to the people around us?

The participants in the meetings in Osaka and Tokyo came from all walks of life. All came with their own hopes, whether they were seeking time to entrust a personal problem or question to God, looking for ways to keep a peaceful heart even in the frantic pace of daily work, school or home life, or seeking to rediscover hope in their lives. And each one left afterwards carrying in his or her own heart a different treasure, or «pearl» (Matthew 13:45-46).

In the course of the meeting, we were able to step outside our busy daily lives

for a few days of prayer and reflection. The church that hosted the Tokyo gathering was an island of peace in the middle of the business district, and the lane outside the church, with no traffic or noise, became a garden where children could play and pilgrims could meditate. After the morning prayer, while those who had to go to work or school would go and come back in time for evening prayer and dinner, those able to remain would go to help prepare meals, or pray in the various churches in the area, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran – becoming a living symbol of the unity among Christians so vital to the «pilgrimage of trust». In addition to prayer and volunteer service, we also explored ways to use our creative gifts to communicate a message of hope, through singing or listening to music, writing poetry, or reflecting on paintings and photographs that the Taizé brother present with us had chosen to portray the spirit of the Beatitudes.

After the meetings, each participant returned home carrying his or her own «pearl» of new insight, wisdom, peace, hope, or quiet confidence in the presence of God. Someone commented, «It's wonderful that there can be this much happiness in one day!» and went on to reflect that this happiness did not come from adding anything extra to our lives, like new possessions or hobbies, but

rather from simplifying our lives to what is essential, and making time for prayer, song, and silence together. We all went home filled with the desire to keep the spirit of prayer and reflection alive in our daily lives, alone or in communion with others. The meetings were all too brief, but the pilgrimage in daily life never ends. We continue to sing, pray, use our talents to create beauty and hope around us, and share the journey with our fellow pilgrims – as we all watch steadfastly for the dawn.

Bangladesh

Small Schools for the Poor

Taizé brothers have been living in Bangladesh for many years. Here, one of them describes the small schools they have started among the very poor that local youth help to run.

The people we live among are almost entirely Muslims, with a small Hindu minority and a few Christians. So as soon as we came to live in Mymensingh in 1987, in order to build bridges of trust, we started small schools for the poor. At that time, very few children in the poor areas near our home went to school. These areas are densely populated and we soon got to know many people there. Once the children started going to

Meeting in Mexico

From Thursday 15 to Sunday 18 May, in collaboration with the Bishop's Commission for Youth Ministry (CEMPAJ), two Taizé brothers will lead a youth meeting at Aguascalientes, a city of a million inhabitants in the center of Mexico.

www.taize.fr/en/enplgmr.htm

Prayers in Tokyo in April

Several prayers will take place in April in Tokyo during the visit of a brother in Japan. During the months of September and October 2002, the meetings in Tokyo will be preceded by visits to Hiroshima, Shizuoka, Maebashi et Sendai.

www.taize.fr/en/enplgap.htm

Poland after Paris

Meetings in Poland are planned at Poznan from 14 to 16 March et at Rzeszow from 21 to 23 March. In continuity with the Paris meeting, those responsible for the points of preparation throughout the country have been invited to share their experiences about the months of preparation and of the meeting itself.

www.taize.fr/en/enplgeur.htm

A Lenten weekend in Gambia

Young people from the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches have been invited to a weekend of prayer, reflection and sharing centered on the wellsprings of faith, from Friday 4 to Sunday 6 April. Two brothers will lead the meeting at the Shalom Retreat Centre, Banjul, Gambia.

www.taize.fr/en/enplgafr.htm

Prayer in Kalimantanang

Invited by the bishop in charge of young adult ministry in Indonesia, 500 young people gathered together on 20 February in the cathedral of Sintang, at Kalimantanang, for a prayer service. The quality of the silence was quite impressive.

www.taize.fr/en/enplgap.htm

school, the mentalities started to change. Many of the rickshaw-pullers and coolies are proud that their children are going to school, in spite of being so poor. And they will tell you how they too can write their names and read simple sentences. Fifteen years ago, we started evening classes for the mothers and fathers too. The schools are places where the children learn to read and write. They also learn mathematics, a little English, some geography and the values that are important in their lives and in their society. Each religious group has its own religious teacher. The schools are also places where the young teachers—Muslims, Hindus and Christians—learn to work together. Serving the poor together encourages a sense of being one human family. In our monthly meetings, we try to encourage them to discover an attitude of heart that cares for justice, peace and love for the poor, and a respect for each other's religion and culture.

When we first arrived in Mymensingh an elderly man came to help us chop wood for cooking. We called him "uncle", "cha cha" in Bengali. That was the start of a long and deep friendship. Cha cha is an old man now and a little bent, but he still comes to make his weekly visit to us, from his village, Borovila, about 5 kilometers north of the city. He comes on foot and as he leaves again he always says, "Every night when I say my ramaz (prayers), I pray for each one of you." "Allah gives to you and to me the same message: Love one another, help the poor and live together in peace."

In 1990, we started a school in the cha cha's village. His real name is Mohammed Abdul Aziz and the school is named after him. The area was poor and no one went to school. The first years were difficult. When I went on my bike to visit, children would call after me "Christian!" which was not meant as a compliment. Today, the school has 300 students. The teachers—among them are two Christians, because the cha cha insists that Christians should be present in the village—are dedicated people. The headmaster is a handicapped person. On my last visit, in December for the last school day, the schoolyard was crowded with fathers of the students, among them the imam of the local mosque. The mothers were invited too and quite a few came, standing in the background.

In these six schools, that have about 1000 pupils, young people teach the children. They are students themselves. They do this as a part-time job in order to be able to finish their college studies in the city. They earn 1000 taka a month (around 18 US dollars). At the start of each year, there is a training session for the teachers, with a similar session every month where questions of justice, peace and harmonious living between people of different religions are dealt

with. Sometimes there are questions like, "What does God/Allah expect of me?" These young people have a dream, a motivation, and, encouraged by this dream, their teaching bears much fruit. The pilgrimage of trust on earth has many, many faces. What these young schoolteachers are living in solidarity with the poor in the slums and villages here is one of these faces. It fills us with trust for the future.

Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription
Ordinary subscription: 6 (France 4,5) Euros
Supporting subscription: 10 or 20 Euros

Means of payment:

- by credit card Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue: send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé, and say what sum in Euros you wish to transfer.
- by international Giro transfer in Euros addressed to: Lettre de Taizé, CCP 20041-01007 -0061446M038-71 or CCP LYON 614 46 M.
- by cheque in Euros to Lettre de Taizé, F-71250 Taizé Communauté, made payable through Société Générale.

In certain countries it is possible to pay within the country:
Australia: \$12 - Letter from Taizé, P.O. Box 769, North Sydney, NSW 2059
Canada: \$10 (CIBC 010 04922 04 17130), Letter from Taizé c/o Lesley Santiago, 6643 Montevideo Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 4E8.
New Zealand: \$15 - c/o Jenny Chisholm, 13 Arden Way, Wilton, Wellington.
UK: £4.50 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Nick and Jane SHIELDS, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns, WAKEFIELD, W. Yorkshire WF1 3JZ.
USA: \$7 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Bruder, P.O. Box 1954, Lenox, MA 01240.
For Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

Asia: The Letter from Taizé can also be obtained in the following Asian countries. Contributions towards the cost of photocopying and postage will be most welcome.

India: Letter from Taizé, c/o Brothers of Holy Cross, 47, St Mark's Road, Bangalore 560 001.
Korea: English edition. Ordinary Subscription: 2,000 Supporting Subscription: 4,000 to: Letter from Taizé, c/o Hwa Gok Dong 105-51, Kang Seo Ku, Seoul 157-010.
Philippines: Letter from Taizé, c/o 28 San Antonio Street, San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City.
Bangladesh: Letter from Taizé, P O Box 48, H.P.O. 2200, Mymensingh.
Cambodia: Fr. Sri Pramong Virachai, BP 123 Phnom Penh.
Hong Kong: Ingrid Chan, Flat H, 14/F, Tower 125, 11 Po Yan Street, Sheung Wan.
Indonesia: Sister Be Kien Nio, Biarawati Ursulin, Jln Angrek 60, Bandung 40114.
Japan: Isao Uematsu, c/o Yoda, 6-43-5 Shimoshakujii, Nerima-ku, Tokyo 177-0042.
Malaysia: Tiong Marcella Lee, No 33 Lot 201, Jalan Sg Maong Bahr, 93150 Kuching, Sarawak.
Pakistan: Bushra Veronica, c/o Ch. Naem Shakir, Advocate of High Court, 7 Turner Road, Lahore.
Singapore: Angela Lee, 79 King's Road, 268141.
Sri Lanka: Martin Costa, 31 Major Lalaka Fernando Mawatha, Kapuwatte Ja-Ela.
Taiwan: Anna Tang, Aurora Center, N° 9, Lane 71, Hang Chow S. Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, ROC.
Thailand: CYO, 122/6-7 Soi Nakswan, Nonsee Road, Yannawa, Bangkok 10120.

Correspondence: Letter from Taizé, 71250 Taizé-Communauté, France
e-mail: lettre@taize.fr www.taize.fr
News from Taizé by email twice a month free of charge:
www.taize.fr/taizenews.htm

Lettre 229 - DRA V. Rogeaux - Com. par. 0105K79608 - DL 977
Ateliers et Presses de Taizé